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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1004
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RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0037
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KTIP SMIG KWMN KJUS PHUM PGOV PREL TH BM CH
SUBJECT: RAIDS NET FIVE SUSPECTED HUMAN TRAFFICKERS; TWO VICTIMS RECEIVING ASSISTANCE

REF: 08 Chiang Mai 126 (Putting the TIP Law to its First Test)

Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

Summary and Comment

¶11. (SBU) Coordinated raids at two Chiang Mai karaoke bars on February 18 led to the arrest of five suspected traffickers and the rescue of two victims -- minors who were allegedly forced into prostitution. The suspects remain in custody while the police collect evidence and assemble witnesses. The two victims, both of whom are Chinese nationals, are at a Thai Government shelter in Bangkok. If convicted, the suspects could face both lengthy prison terms and hefty fines. Coordinated raids like this one and the one reported in Reftel demonstrate that local and provincial authorities can successfully work with the central Thai Government to prosecute traffickers and protect victims, despite endemic police corruption. End Summary and Comment.

A Stroke of Luck Leads to Raids and Arrests

¶12. (SBU) According to press reports, the two victims in this case escaped from the Chiang Mai karaoke bar in which they had been forced to work as prostitutes on February 14, and made contact with the Thai Tourist Police. The police gave them temporary protection, and during preliminary questioning, determined that they were 17 and 18 years old. By February 18, the police had collected sufficient evidence and secured arrest warrants for the five traffickers involved -- the two Chinese nationals who brought the victims from Kunming, China to Thailand, and the three Thai owners of the karaoke bars in which the girls were sexually exploited. Contacts at TRAFCORD, which serves as a coordination body between the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and provincial/local authorities, told us that all five traffickers were apprehended (two at their residence in Chiang Mai, and the other three at their respective karaoke establishments) on February 18, and that searches of the two bars did not turn up additional victims. The operation was jointly carried out by TRAFCORD, the Chiang Mai Tourist Police, Chiang Mai's Provincial Center to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking, and the Royal Thai Police's Children, Juvenile, and Women Division (CWD), a special unit that deals with crimes against children and women.

The Protection and Prosecution Angles

¶13. (SBU) According to TRAFCORD, both victims are currently

residing at an RTG shelter in Bangkok awaiting interrogation in preparation for the trials of the five trafficking suspects. Meanwhile, Thai authorities are working with TRAFCORD to locate the victim's families in Kunming, and determine the suitability of the situation there for their possible repatriation to China.

As for the traffickers, all face charges under Thailand's 2008 TIP law and criminal code, and could be imprisoned for life if convicted on all counts under both statutes for trafficking and procuring sex for minors. They also face maximum fines of \$4,570 each. Currently, their cases remain under investigation with the CWD.

Coerced from China to Thailand Via Burma

¶4. (SBU) According to the victims' statements, the ordeal leading to their escape was long and painful. It began in February 2008 when they were 16 and 17 years old. They were coerced by two Chinese nationals with whom they were well-acquainted to accompany them to the Thai-Burma border town of Tachilek, where the would-be traffickers were to receive some \$28,500 from an unidentified man. From there, they were taken to Chiang Mai and sold into prostitution. After eight months apart, the two victims were reunited and forced to work as prostitutes at one karaoke bar, where they remained until their February 2009 escape.

¶5. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.

MORROW